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ABSTRACT

An analysis of two French-English business dictionaries, a 1989 revised edition and a 1990 edition, looks at a number of weaknesses in the resources' design and content. First, problems are found in transcriptions of pronunciation that do not reflect actual usage when it differs from convention and in lack of attention to pronunciation of words borrowed from English. It is also found that important business-related abbreviations and acronyms are not always easy to locate or are sometimes omitted. Occasional significant variations in definition are also noted. Finally, the main body of definitions is seen as flawed by major omissions, a number of which are specified, and in definitions that differ from those in other dictionaries. Despite these, flaws, it is noted that each of the business dictionaries analyzed has other valuable features and that both remain indispensable tools for business language instruction. (MSE)

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PROBLEMS WITH FRENCH-ENGLISH BUSINESS DICTIONARIES

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at the

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PROBLEMS WITH FRENCH-ENGLISH DICTIONARIES

Those who have taught and studied Commercial French, French for Business, or Français Langue des Affaires since the late seventies, who had only the out-of-date Ketteridge dictionary to rely on, were delighted with the publication of the Harrap's Business Dictionary in 1986 and its subsequent revision in 1989 and the Larousse Business Dictionary in 1990. These reference works, to be sure, are still the most useful tools available for the students and teachers of those courses. In the process of using them in several classes, however, some problems have repeatedly arisen. The purpose of this study is to point out some of the shortcomings of these two volumes, particularly from the professor or student point of view.

Before discussing the primary aspects of the vocabulary definitions, attention should be focused on some perhaps less important weaknesses. The pronunciation of the French language is relatively consistent, but there are many words, some of them to do with business, which present exceptions. The absence of phonetic descriptions in both works creates difficulties for students who would like to know how to pronounce words or expressions such as ad valorem (How would one know to pronounce the "d" in ad or to desalize the final "em" and say [ɛm])? The same question relates to spécimen [spesimɛn]. Along the same vein is intérim [ɛ́terim]. Is brut [bry or bryt), or but [by or byt]? How would one know about these options? How would a student know that the "act" in contact can be rendered like the "act" in exact [ɛgza] or can it be pronounced [kõtakt]. Since there is no accent mark over the second "o" cooptation, how would one know to say [kɔɔptasjõ]? A student needs guidance with exprès. The Académie declares

that [ɛksprɛ] alone is acceptable, but Robert claims common usage requires [ɛkspreɛs]. There are many others such as frèt which is properly [frɛ], but is universally pronounced [frɛt] in the transportation industry, especially in the maritime area. How can a student be aware that hall is [ol] and not [al]? Many dictionaries have legs [lɛ], but common usage demands [lɛg]. How many non-native speakers would know that seing is [sɛ̃]? The absence of pronunciation indicators does obviously create problems for the professor and student. What is often more troublesome is the pronunciation of anglicisms or franglais.

Because native speakers of French often give an unexpected pronunciation to English words which have been borrowed, it is not safe to assume that using the normal sounds will clearly communicate. There are presently over two thousand anglicisms, mostly business terms, in current useage in French to which the purists object strongly, according to the Dictionnaire des termes officiels de la langue française (Paris 1994). The following are words from Larousse which exemplify problems of pronunciation wherein they do not follow either regular English or French rules. The final "er" presents a difficulty: with blister [blistɛr] and sometimes with manager [manadʤɛr], it is [ɛr], while on best-seller (bɛstsɛlœr], leader [lidœr], and sometimes manager [manaʤœr] it is "œ". There are two renderings for jeans [ʤin] or [ʤinz] because it can be either singular or plural. The normally silent final "t" is often pronounced as in tract [trakt], lockout [lɔkawt], transit [trãzit], trust [trœst], copywright [kɔpirajt], spot [spɔt], etc. To the contrary are words like management which are frequently pronounced without the sound of the final "t": [mana(d)ʒmã], or warrant [varã], which also may be [warã]. Some words have distinctively different renderings in standard French dictionaries: discount is [diskunt] in Hachette (Paris 1989), and [diskawnt] in Robert (Robert Électronique 1992). There are four choices for

management: Robert offers [manaʒmã] and [menedʒmœnt], while Hachette gives, along with [manaʒmã], [manaʒmɛnt] and [manadʒmɛnt]. Merchandising is similar: Robert has [mɛrʃãdiziŋ] and [mɛrʃãdajziŋ], but Hachette provides [mərtʃãdijziŋ]. Some words found in the business dictionaries are not to be found even in Robert and Hachette, e.g. goodwill, shipment, and surbooker. Other terms that are somewhat surprising are those like drawback [drobak], where the "aw" has the sound of a closed "o", and dumping, where the checked "um" is not nasalized as would be expected [dœmpiŋ]. That seems to be sufficient evidence to establish the point that the two business dictionaries under discussion fall short by not having pronunciation information.

Another minor but troublesome item concerns abbreviations and acronyms. The primary textbook for our Advanced Commercial French class is Claude LeGoff's work, French for Business. The following discussion is based on the efficiency or effectiveness of the business dictionaries in relation to the glossary, which includes abbreviations and acronyms, of the 1989 edition (Hatier: Paris). They are easy to find in the Harrap work because they are listed in an appendix separately. In the Larousse it is difficult to find most of them since they are usually buried within a definition where one would not be likely to search. If one has the time to dig into the Larousse, most of them can be found with some notable exceptions: C.E.T.U.P. (Centre de Titres Universel de Paiement), C.N.P.M.E. (Conseil National des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises), ESSEC (Ecole Supérieure de Sciences Économiques et Commerciales), F.O. (Force Ouvrière), R.I.P. (Relève d'Identité Postale), T.C.I. (Termes commerciaux internationaux), T.I.P. (Titre Interbancaire de Paiement). Missing from the rather thorough Harrap list are ANPE (Agence National Pour l'Emploi), COB (Commission des Opérations de Bourse), CPS (caractères secondes), DEPS (dernier entre premier sorti), FCP (fonds communs de placement), FL (florin),

GAB (guichet automatique de banque), GATT (General Agreements on Traifs and Trade), MO (mega octet), OPV (offre publique de vente), PAO (publication assistée par ordinateur), POS (plan d'occupation des sols), R et D (recherche et développement), REER (Régime Enregistré d'Épargne-Retraite, Canadian), RES (Rachat de l'entreprise par des salariés), and VPT (vente par téléphone).

Occasionally there are widely varying definitions. Cv in Larousse is what one might expect: curriculum vitae, but in Harrap it is defined as cheval vapeur. CE in Larousse is Communauté Europénne but Harrap has it meaning comité d'entreprise or caisse d'épargne. Also absent from both are AP (assistant particulier), av (avoir), beau (bordereau), bte (breveté), and others.

Beyond the problems of no pronunciation guide and the omissions and confusions concerning abbreviations and acronyms, there are problems with the main body of definitions. The more significant omissions are armateur (ship owner), bon de réception (notice of receipt of delivery), bourse des marchandises (commodity exchange), centre de groupage (collection center), cachet (artist or performer fee), commande à titre d'essai (trial order), congressiste (convention participant), consentir un découvert (grant an overdraft), cotation á la criée (quotation by oral bid), déclaration d'accident (an accident report), dénoncer un forfait (denounce the agreement), déposer sa signature (give an authorized signature), enlever un marché (get a contract or deal), émeute (riot), entamer des poursuites judiciaires (to initiate legal proceedings), en kit (to be assembled), facture rectifiée (a revised bill), machine à décacheter (letter opener), matériel roulant (rolling stock), numéro vert (800 number), and valeur vénale (market value).

There are significant differences between the definitions given by Le Goff and those of the

dictionaries in several instances. The most notable examples are agio, autogestion, boîte, céder, chargeur, décrocher, mise en demeure, encaissement, fiche, gages, jeton, obligataire, peine, permanence, role, and vedette.

In spite of the problems mentioned above, the Harrap and Larousse business dictionaries remain indispensable tools for the teacher and student of French business language. The Larousse is more current and has an excellent selection of quotations throughout, but the Harrap has the extremely valuable center section which includes bilingual examples of a balance sheet, typical American business expressions, a section on legal and contractual language, as well as a list of abbreviations and acronyms.

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NOTE TO EDITOR CONCERNING PHONETICS

Unfortunately, I was unable to reproduce the IPA exactly in every case with my software, even though I was using the latest Word Perfect (6.0), and the latest version of Windows.

The [ã] should have been [ɑ] with a [¯] above it and the [ɛ́] should have been [ɛ] with the same [¯] above it. There is a way to create those characters with the "overstrike' function, but I haven't been able to do that yet.